

# Green Cleaning Made Easy

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Discussions on cleaning have been around since mankind started living in caves, but today's facility managers are dealing with new issues. Words like sustainability, green buildings, green cleaning and others have become important topics for discussion. This article will cover some of the simplest things that you can do to make a difference not only for your customers, but also as it relates to these new topics.

## A necessary evil

Unfortunately, many facility managers see cleaning simply as a necessary evil. It is a large expense (approximately \$1.50/sq. ft.) and one that has to be managed (and often reduced). It is often the cause of plenty, if not the majority, of occupant complaints. Green Cleaning is an enormously cost-effective strategy since it is already part of your budget and frequently doesn't cost more. Furthermore, it can help occupants understand what green can really mean to them (I think it's hard for the average occupant to really understand how adding a photo voltaic array affects them).

## Why green and why now?

Green has come and gone a number of times over the past 30 years—always with noble intentions and an important message, but never sticking. But now it's different. Today the green movement is deeply rooted in the concept of sustainability—"meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." With each passing day (and news story), from Katrina and the intensifi-

cation of weather patterns to global warming to pandemic flu to melting glaciers and raising coastlines to concerns of insurance carriers, the message is getting through. And it's no longer just about doing the right thing; green is sticking because it is now making economic sense. The cost for inaction has become higher than the cost to change.

It is also sticking because the green movement has made it easier. IFMA itself has launched an important initiative on sustainability and organizations like the U.S. Green Building Council and their LEED rating systems not only help educate the marketplace, but have begun to layout what facility managers can do in practical steps. And as these and other similar programs continue to develop, green will get easier and easier.



## What is green?

Green should be looked at in the same way we consider terms like "Kaizen" which is the Japanese business term for continual improvement. Green is not a "thing." There is no single definition of what does or does not constitute green. Rather, it is a concept that seeks to reduce health and environmental impacts. The best definition comes from Presidential Executive Order 13101 which defines it as "...products and services that reduce health and environmental impacts compared to similar products and services used for the same purpose."

The two key messages are that a green product or service has to simultaneously reduce impacts on both health and the environment. It is not enough to reduce health impacts while destroying the environment. Nor is it enough to use "natural" products that might give product users cancer. Simultaneously it must reduce impacts on both health and the environment.

The second takeaway is that green is a comparison. While there are a few products that clearly should be replaced, for example those that are known to cause cancer, but most products fall in a gray area. Thus, the second key takeaway is that no matter where a product falls on a health and environmental spectrum, our goal should be to reduce those impacts. The "green" Kaizen works to continually improve our performance on health and environmental impacts compared to traditional practices.

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CSI International Inc.	Interface Architectural Signage	Sebesta Blomberg	VPSI Inc.
Davies Office Refurbishing	Inspired Environments		Wall Innovators Inc.
Dryvit Systems	IntegResource		WorkRite Ergonomics
Duro-Last Roofing Inc.	International Window Cleaning Association		
Dynasound Inc., Soundmasking & Eavesdropping Protection Divisions	Johnson Controls Inc.		
Earth Protection Services Inc.			
Egan Visual Inc.			

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\*as of Oct. 18, 2006

**What is green cleaning?**

In its most simplistic definition, green cleaning is “cleaning to protect health without harming the environment.” It recognizes the important role that cleaning has in creating healthy, high-performing environments which result in increased worker productivity, decreased absenteeism, improved student performance on standardized tests and other positive performance metrics.

Green cleaning also recognizes the huge impacts that cleaning has on the environment itself. For example, commercial cleaning in the United States annually consumes 6 billion pounds of cleaning chemicals, 4.5 billion pounds of janitorial paper and 1 billion pounds of equipment. As a result of the impacts from extracting the raw materials, the emissions to air and water along with the energy consumption from manufacturing those raw materials into finished products, and the ultimate use and disposal of these products are huge.

And finally, whether we want to admit it or not, some of the traditional products used for cleaning are hazardous. Every year, 6 percent of cleaning personnel are injured by these products and occupa-

tional asthma is on the rise. Today, we simply don't have to accept any of this.

**Why should facility managers care?**

Facility managers should consider green cleaning for two simple reasons. The first is because it is a large budget item. The national average for cleaning is approximately \$1.50 per square foot in a Class A Commercial Building. And I would argue that while this is the national average, it only represents a minimal amount of cleaning and that occupant performance would be improved if buildings invested more in cleaning in a manner that enhanced the performance of their occupants; however, this is a discussion for another day.

Today, green cleaning is an excellent opportunity due to its tremendous return-on-investment. Increasing demand and competitive forces have resulted in both lower costs for green products which now perform comparably to traditional products in almost every category. Thus, benefits are had and risks are reduced with no increase in cost in most product categories.

But there is perhaps a more powerful reason for converting to green cleaning—and this is

marketing. I have often spoken with building occupants who want to be green and do the right thing. They want to be part of an organization making a difference. But often times it seemed that adding a vegetative roof or photo voltaic arrays or even using recycled products or sustainably harvested wood was difficult for them to understand how it affected them and their families. Thus, one of the greatest strengths of implementing green cleaning is that occupants understand how it directly affects them. It can affect their health. It can affect their children. These are good things and help demonstrate why sustainability and other green building measures are good. It is about them and their health, and it does make a difference.

In addition, when we market a building, we are not only marketing to our occupants through newsletter, signage, etc., but we market to perspective tenants and other stakeholders (i.e., stockholders, visitors and customers). Green cleaning is a very simple program that people not only “get,” but they value. Think about it: wouldn't you prefer to work, shop or own a building that is focused on creating a healthier building with lower environmental impacts? Or is a traditional cleaning program good enough?

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**Need not reinvent the wheel**

Over the past five years, a number of organizations in a variety of building segments have developed guidelines for green cleaning, which makes it unnecessary for facility managers to spend time researching what constitutes a green cleaning program. Using these guidelines as “roadmaps,” facility managers can spend their limited time implementing the program, rather than researching it.

Roadmaps include the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED for Existing Buildings, Hospitals for a Health Environment's 10 Steps to Green Cleaning, Collaborative for High Performance Schools' Best Practices Manual Volume IV (Maintenance and Operations), and the Healthy Schools Campaign's Quick and Easy Guide to Green Cleaning in Schools.

**Tips on implementing your green cleaning program**

While this article has been written to make implementing a green cleaning program easy, as we all know, change is hard. So if you're going to spend your time, effort and political capital implementing a program—make it work! A successful program has multiple pieces, the two most important being a successful initial “pilot” (my experience has been that if the first pilot fails, it will be hard to get another try) and the second is your “green Kaizen”—establishing a process for continual improvement.

Begin by building a “green team.” This team will be very valuable and in addition to the facility manager (or your representative) should include a wide array of building occupants and stakeholders. One group I'd

strongly encourage for your green team is your vendors—your cleaning contractor and product suppliers. They are highly motivated to help and can provide the manpower to help with a lot of the data gathering, assessments, training, communications and more.

The second step is to identify the initial pilot site. Because the first pilot is so important, look for a “slam-dunk”—a building that gives you the best chance of success. Some of the keys are having a good cleaning supervisor who will follow directions and make sure that the new products and process will be adhered to, a good cleaning crew, a building with few problems (i.e., roof leaks, IAQ problems, faulty HVAC system, labor unrest, occupant health issues, etc.) and willing occupants. The next step is to assess the needs of the building. Typically you'll want to establish a baseline which can include a simple assessment of cleanliness, information on cleaning chemicals including MSD sheets, paper products, equipment, entryway mats, waste and recycling, etc.

With this information the green team can complete a simple plan. Inevitably you'll find many things that are easy to do and can be implemented at little to no cost, while other opportunities may be more difficult or costly. There is no right or wrong plan. The key is to get started and have some clear goals and a plan that has group “buy-in” that leads to continual improvement as you move forward.

Following these simple roadmaps, getting started and building a process for continual improvement can truly make a difference and set the tone for all of your green initiatives. **FMJ**

**Resources**

U.S. Green Building Council:  
[www.usgbc.org](http://www.usgbc.org)

Hospitals for a Healthy Environment:  
[www.h2e-online.org](http://www.h2e-online.org)

Collaborative for High Performance Schools:  
[www.chps.net](http://www.chps.net)

Healthy Schools Campaign:  
[www.HealthySchoolsCampaign.org](http://www.HealthySchoolsCampaign.org)

Green Seal:  
[www.GreenSeal.org](http://www.GreenSeal.org)

Environmental Choice:  
[www.EnvironmentalChoice.com](http://www.EnvironmentalChoice.com)

EPA's Design for the Environment Program (DfE):  
[www.epa.gov/dfc](http://www.epa.gov/dfc)

Chlorine Free Products Association:  
[www.ChlorineFreeProducts.org](http://www.ChlorineFreeProducts.org)

Carpet and Rug Institute:  
[www.Carpet-Rug.com](http://www.Carpet-Rug.com)

EPA's Comprehensive Procurement Guidelines:  
[www.epa.gov/cpg](http://www.epa.gov/cpg)

California Code of Regulations (VOC's in cleaning products):  
[www.arb.ca.gov/consprod/regs/cp.pdf](http://www.arb.ca.gov/consprod/regs/cp.pdf)

**About the Author:**



Stephen Ashkin is founder and president of The Ashkin Group, LLC an internationally recognized consulting firm whose mission is to “green” the cleaning industry. He is a 25-year veteran of the cleaning industry, having worked in key management positions in both consumer and commercial products companies. Ashkin has been working on green cleaning since 1990 and has received extensive recognition for his work on the subject. For more information call 812-332-7950 or visit [www.AshkinGroup.com](http://www.AshkinGroup.com).

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